

The 128th

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Summary: The covenant are breaching earths defenses and threaten the existence of mankind. The tales of marine soldiers not usually heard of but are none the less heroes. Set near the end of halo 2

1. Bearing

All the listed characters, objects and existing references to already conceived plots are the property of Bungie and the Microsoft Corporation. I am simply writing this story because I really enjoy the plot and elements of the game Bungie has created and believe that I can create a good story out of the existing pieces.

* * *

>It was dark. The faint green glow of a light stick radiated from the center of the room, the only source of light. A slight shuffling in one of the rooms corners broke the eerie silence and gave a slight intimation that there was something alive in this lonely space.<p><p>

Corporal, Michael Grant was propped up against the wall, staring at the light stick and thinking profusely. If anything he was thinking simply as a self excuse to stay in the relative safety of the room just a little longer.

Against the opposite wall from Michael lies his dead commanding officer, a blue covering draped over his unmoving mass. The covering hid the sight from Michaels view; however he could do nothing to mask the smell.

A single doorway, shut tight and locked was the only way out or into the room, and Michael focused on it. He was after all alone, and for all he knew the station had already been overrun and it was just a matter of time till those doors opened and he would be killed on sight.

Michael wasn't the type to fool himself; he knew that scenario was all too possible; however he didn't let fear cloud his mind. Part of rational thinking after all was to not let little variables as emotions get in the way of a solution. No. The only thing that would stop Michael's actions was physical obstructions, not mental. Long ago had the marine grasped this concept and it had helped him through many hard situations.

Michael's goal was to get out of this situation alive, nothing more. His platoon's original mission was to guard airlock 12B from breaching of the covenant. They had come en masse however, outflanked them, and forced Michael to retreat with the surviving marines. In all the confusion, Michael had managed to lock him and his wounded CO into a supply closet.

After only a few minutes however the lone soldier's companion succumbed to the multiple burns across his body and had went without a sound. The hardened marine's death was yet another mental obstruction Michael pushed out of his mind.

To the task at hand however, the corporal was still contemplating. The first thing Michael had to do was to determine what he had at his disposal. All the items he had considered useful were neatly laid out in front of him. Some may have found it a little silly to be so organized in this kind of situation, but it was simply yet another habit the marine had developed.

Michael peered down at the objects in front of him and quickly went through them. He still had his battle rifle, which in the intense fighting had fortunately not been damaged. Along with the rifle he had his M6C magnum, a small fleck of blue blood on the tip. Michael had removed the magazines from his weapons. In addition to these firearms, the marine also displayed a sheathed, double edged combat knife, three concussion grenades, some polyurethane thread, two C rations, his water canteen, an unused light stick, an optic cable, his level 1 security clearance card, his standard issue PDA, a single can of .50 caliber ammunition, one hundred thirty-eight rounds of 7.62mm ammunition for his rifle, and sixty rounds of 12.7mm ammunition for his pistol.

He had copped much of his munitions from his dead comrade, and had found the rations inside an open crate stored in the room. All in all he didn't have much, but he would make due. The next thing that Michael thought to do was to figure out the relative status of the station. The young marine accessed a general purpose map of the ship on his PDA and tried to locate exactly where he was. In the chaos of retreat, Michael had no idea where he had run.

He knew that he was on deck twelve, the second uppermost deck of the station. There was no designated rallying point aboard the station, so Michael couldn't be sure where any survivors could be for him to join up with. If anything, he should head for the station's central command so that he could access the station's com. systems. The command post was five levels down, on the seventh floor.

Plotting a path to the nearest elevator, Michael began to pack up his equipment. The marine shoved the gear in his backpack, and strapped it on. He loaded and cocked his pistol, then placed it in his hip holster, ready for use. Sheathing his knife he latched it sideways to the back of his belt. Re-checking all of his straps and buckles,

Michael donned his helmet.

Finally the marine picked up his rifle, replaced the magazine, racked the chamber and gripped the weapon with both hands. All of this preparation gave Michael confidence that he would be prepared for anything, even if he was going into unknown territory alone.

Taking one last deep breath, the soldier did a once-over of the room, spied his comrades corpse one last time, and then, with a swipe of his security card, opened the door that he had become so accustomed to.

With a snap, Michael drew his rifle forward, checking both ways of the deserted hall. It was quiet. The ambient noise however of a small fire, prevented absolute silence. Except for the burning panel against the opposite wall, the hall looked untouched. The stains of dried blood on the floor reminded Michael of his earlier struggle. Slowly venturing out, Michael headed left down the hall, rifle drawn.

Eventually, he came to a closed door, coming near it, the door opened automatically. Peering around the corner, the marine surveyed the room. It was tall, about 2 stories, and had several low islands about four feet tall dotting the floor. Creeping along the side of the nearest island, Michael heard a high pitched squeak. The marine froze in his tracks.

He knew the sound, a grunt, and it was relatively close. Michael peered around the corner and sure enough, the stout figure of orange and purple came into sight. Michael retracted. _A lone grunt, just one, and a minor at that, no problem, _thought the marine as he hefted his rifle. Peering over the top of the short island at the pacing figure some forty feet away, Michael slowly leveled his firearm. The crosshairs of his scope lined up with the grunt, still squabbling and staring at the floor in deep thought, oblivious to the weapon aimed at him.

About to squeeze the trigger, Michael hesitated. _What could that thing be thinking about?_ He asked himself. It's not as though he could ask, but the young marine simply couldn't help but be curious. For years he had mechanically slaughtered these creatures, all of which looked the same, and never asked himself about their intelligence.

Is it possible that they had a civilized society just like mankind? And that whenever one was killed in action, they had families to grieve over them? How exactly did they themselves view mankind? All of these questions arose for some strange reason as the lone grunt stood, scratched the back of his head, fiddled with his plasma pistol.

All these questions couldn't be answered here and were irrelevant to his current task, thought Michael. He could sort the answers out later. Re-steadying his aim, Michael pulled the trigger without a second thought.

The shot pierced the silence of the tall chamber, the round whistling through the sterile air. Then with a loud, wet, splash, a fan of blue appeared on one of the islands, a moment before the grunt itself slammed against the metal, slumping to the floor, a single, wisp of

white smoke trailing from its head.

Slowly proceeding to the fresh kill, Michael scooped up the ejected shell casing. He stared down at the dead grunt, and tossed the casing next to its plasma pistol. "If your death causes pain among the living, then I am sorry, and if it does not, then I am even sorrier".

Stooping down, Michael snatched the single plasma grenade attached to the corpses belt and exited the chamber.

* * *

>Michael proceeded past an open bulkhead and took a right past a pile of burning wreckage. Empty crates and papers were scattered across the floor, the halls so quiet, paranoia was creeping up Michael's fingertips. Every, corner, every shadow, every open doorway, anything could be lurking, waiting.<p><p>

The vent grates were particularly disturbing. Eyes could be watching Michael, eyes of anyone, and anything, hidden in the darkness. So desperately did the marine want to break the silence, to have something for him to interact with, even if it was covenant.

Michael began to speed up now, breaking into a run. The lift was around the next corner, he was almost thereâ€|

Michael turned the final corner and his fears ripped through his stomach. A familiar figure, a tall figure, which's gleaming blue armor was blinding in the white light. Michael threw his weight in the opposite direction as fast as his inertia could carry him. The hum of the elite's plasma rifle was already in the air, and Michael could see the blue bolt heading straight for him. Willing gravity to move quicker, the marine's vision was clouded with the cold metal of the bulkhead, as a splash of blue sparks exploded in front of him.

Pushing himself up against the metal, Michael quickly reoriented himself, gripping his rifle as more liquid plasma splattered onto the floor mere inches from him. He turned his face away from the corner, so a stray droplet didn't strike his exposed flesh.

The moment the stream stopped, the soldier edged his way to the corner, a portion of the metal glowing red and bubbling from the sudden temperature increase. Thrusting his rifle around the corner, he opened fire, pulling the trigger once, twice, three times, and four. The rounds zipped downrange. A single orange clad grunt shrieked as one of the hardened tips sliced through his shoulder. The pint sized creature dropped his plasma pistol and was sent sprawling to the floor as a second round cut his left leg from out under him. The air around the minor elite crackled as his shield flared to life, deflecting a round into a nearby garbage can, sending it crashing to the floor.

The elite retreated behind a cylindrical shaped storage container as additional rounds raked across its torso. As soon as the creature was out of sight, Michael dashed from the corner, and dived behind a collapsible shield, as the elite guided blue energy right behind his heels. Popping up, Michael pinched off a round, and ducked back down, plotting his next move.

Fifty feet away, Nammamee usa' squatted behind his cover, directly in front of the lift which was Michaels goal, waiting for the human to emerge. A low whining noise got the elites attention. Several feet away, the grunt that he had been traveling with was slowly crawling towards him, a trail of blue phosphor behind him. "P-please master, h-help meâ€|" the wounded creature begged. Nammamee scoffed and hefted his plasma rifle.

* * *

>Michael slowly inched the small cable around the corner of the shield, the optics already hard wired into his battle suits wrist link. The image the cable provided was a clear, crisp picture on the marines head visor. The tipped garbage can was the first thing to come into view, a small tendril of smoke arising from the side. Slowly inching the cable to the left, a small crumpled heap came into picture. Michael realized it was the grunt he had wounded seconds ago, slowly crawling towards the crate that concealed the elite.<p><p>

Focusing on the small orange figure, Michael heard it cry out so pathetically it was almost painful. Then from behind the crate, the clawed hand of the elite appeared, plasma rifle glowing with energy.

Then with a sickening screech, a sound that sounded like a sledge hammer striking a watermelon and the distinct buzz of plasma, the grunts head exploded. It was sickening, pieces of hot flesh splattered against the walls and floor, droplets of blue blood studding everything around. The headless corpse, one claw still raised in a plea for help, slumped back to the floor. Michael retracted the cord, the image still fresh in his mind, mildly shocked. The marine was used to such sights, nature in all of its colors, bright shades of purple, blue, and red. Shoving the cord back in his hip pack, Michael pulled out his recently procured plasma grenade.

Arching up from behind the shield, grenade in hand, the soldier extended his left arm behind him and hit the fuse with his thumb. The loud crescendo of the plasma grenades whine approached rapidly and once Michaels mental aiming was complete, he lobbed the glowing sphere up and out across the no-mans-land of hallway. Briefly illuminating the dark space, the ball of light arced downward toward the target crate. At the same moment, Nammamee Usa' lifted his head above his cover, so as to check the humans status, and the light filled his vision.

The elite knew what was happening but did not posses the reflexes needed to react. The blue sphere slammed into his face plate, the ball glowed brighter and more brilliant and seemed to be enlarging. In the final second, the howling creature stood defiantly as the glowing orb peaked solid white and detonated.

The force of the explosion sent the creature's body hurling downwards to the floor, a cloud of purple showered the area within a six foot radius. Bits of armor and flesh splattered against the ceiling, walls, and floor, like wet sponges. The nearby corpse of the betrayed grunt was sent hurling into the wall behind Michael, the armor burned and melted.

Then all was quiet. A noticeable smell hung in the air, like that of an air conditioner that had been running too long. Stepping out from behind the shield, Michael surveyed the scene. The elite was up against the door of the lift, his upper torso vaporized, and ringed by his own gore. The marine walked quickly to the lift and swiped his security card. Within seconds the tell tale ring of the elevator sounded and the doors opened with a mechanical whoosh. The dead elite twitched slightly as the door propping him up vanished, and then lay silent.

Michael stepped into the lift and shoved the portion of the elite that had fallen in back out into the hall. He hit the level seven key and stood to one side of the elevators door. Chokepoints meant one thing: lump victory. Chokepoints were narrow passages, where individuals had to be bunched together and move single file, with little or no cover whatsoever. Explosives or even a single automatic weapon could slaughter dozens if they are caught in a choke. Even worse, the team being fired upon really had no way to return fire, lest they hit their own comrades.

Basically it was a deadly formula, which almost always assured victory for one side and death for the other. Doorways, narrow halls, hatches of vehicles, elevators, all of them served as chokes. Michael knew this well and while readying his optic cable, wished to be out of the confines of the elevator as soon as possible.

The elevator ceased motion, and for an instant all was quiet. Then the door parted down the middle and left Michael to his fate. Pushing his optic cable once again around the corner, the marine saw no sign of hostility waiting for him. The fairly large room showed signs of battle however, ominously enough. Stowing the cable, the soldier gripped his rifle and proceeded.

_Must be one of the crew lounges, _Michael thought to himself, eyeing the tables that dotted the room. A row of vending machines was lined up on the wall directly to Michael's right. Crouching behind the nearest machine, the marine took out his PDA.

The bright picture of the ships map flashed into view and Michael located his position. _There's one door out of this place, in the opposite corner, follow the hall to the right, and it should lead me to a door that opens to the top floor of the bridge, _Michael thought. He was close, but he still needed to be cautious.

A sudden groan caused Michaels heart to drop. He quickly attempted to shrug off the nausea and coldness in his spine that the noise had caused and tried to focus on where it came from. Surveying the room, Michael's eyes caught a splatter of blood against the far wall. Creeping out to the nearest table, the scene became apparent. Fighting had indeed been waged here as the bodies proved. The corpse of a red armor clad elite was sprawled against an overturned table, dried blood trailing from the multiple piercing in his chest.

A Moving closer, Michael swallowed. The familiar form of a green marine lay spread eagle on the ground, a gruesome wound to the back was the cause of death. Michael could have just imagined the pain as the plasma burned through him, in fact a small flame was still burning from the charred hole. The groan sounded again, causing Michael to jump. It was right on top of him. A second upturned table was the

source, the marine concluded.

Side-stepping slowly with his rifle drawn, Michael circled to the other side of the table.

A single marine sat up against the table, both hands covering a gaping wound in his abdomen, blood all over his body. Michael immediately lowered his rifle and stooped to the marine's side. He was incredibly pale, having lost nearly all his blood, but he was still conscious. The mortally injured soldier managed to raise his right hand in a gesture to indicate Michael to come closer. He did so and strained to listen to the dying mans scratchy voice.

"E-earn this," the soldier said, so quietly Michael nearly didn't catch it. Without another second to pass, the marine ceased to move. Michael slumped back on his heels. _What did he mean? _The marine thought. The words flashed once in his head, _earn this, earn what, death? How do you earn death?_ Michael thought to himself. There was no time to think though, as the soldier felt himself getting carried away again. Michael pushed the item to the back of his priorities list.

* * *

>Michael continued down the next hall that would lead him to the bridge. He had searched both marines and had found little. A few magazine of battle rifle ammunition and a fragmentation grenade, as well as both soldiers combat knives and an M6C.<p><p>

Climbing underneath a half opened blast door, the marine spotted the sealed door. A red light shown on its lock. _Damn, I was afraid of this_, Michael thought. The door was locked and his security card didn't have the clearance to open it. The young man slumped against the wall and to the floor. _A hitch, that's all, I couldn't expect this to go perfect anyway, I just need to find a solution._

Michael concluded there were three solutions. One would be to find a clearance card with the proper security level to open the door; a crewman of the bridge probably possessed one. Two, he could find another door, and try to access the bridge from a different entrance. Of course there was no guarantee _any _of the bridge doors were open, the crew within could have sealed them if they believed that the ship had been overrun. Of course Captain Armstrong hadn't been on the loudspeaker in ages, providing the possibility that the bridge had already been taken by the covenant.

Therefore, Michael had no intention of knocking to try to get the occupants inside to open up, as he had no idea who they may be. His third option then would be to find some way to blast through the door. He really wanted to avoid option three, A, because it was loud, and B, because he would have to procure explosives.

Checking his PDA once again, the marine concluded that he would have to take the lift one floor down, go through a small supply room, and down another hall. The door at the end of that hall was directly below the one Michael was currently slumped against. Looking left down one side of the hall and right down the other, the marine also noticed that both blast doors at each end had been sealed shut. _Guess my only choice is to go down the elevator, _thought the soldier.

"Well let's get to it," he said to himself. Michael stood up quickly, and sprinted down the hallway to the lift, determined as ever.

2. Not Alone

Kiesha Barker swore. Ducking back around the supply cabinet as a new wave of plasma lashed out. The burning bolts of blue and green were beginning to leave small splotches of light on her retinas. Blinking rapidly to coax the spots away, the young marine swapped her SMG magazine out. With one hand she put the weapon around the corner and fired a short burst, the nozzle bucking up from the release.

An elite's shield flared as the rounds impacted around him. The blue armored creature dropped his spent plasma rifle and drew his backup. The jackal crouched next to him charged up its plasma pistol and prepared to release the bolt the next time the human emerged to fire again.

Kiesha lowered her weapon and turned to the figure beside her. Sergeant First Class John Ramos sat next to Kiesha, clutching a magnum in his hands. "Barker, we need to move on their position, were not getting anywhere," the sergeant said. John himself had a large bandage wrapped around his stomach, where he had taken a needle.

"Understood sir, you stay here, give me some covering fire, and I'll try to out maneuver them," Kiesha replied. "Wrong private, your staying here, I'm moving, now hand me your SMG," John yelled out as plasma washed around him.

"With all due respect sir, I think its best that I move since I'm not wounded," Kiesha said quickly before the next bolt struck.

John simply couldn't argue with the logistics. "Alright then," he said reluctantly.

"Be ready to move on my command," the marine sergeant stated. Kiesha stood up, SMG in hand, and prepared to dash out into the open. "Ready, here we go," John said. Kiesha took a deep breath, the only thing on her mind was the supply cabinet that she had to run too, some thirty feet from her current position. The elite ceased firing as his plasma rifle overheated.

"Go!" John called out. Eyes on the target, Kiesha leaped from cover as John emerged with his magnum and opened fire. The bullets zipped down range and struck the jackals shield, flattening against it and falling to the floor. Undeterred by the shots hitting just inches from his face, stopped only by the transparent shield of energy being projected from his wrist, the jackal took aim at the target who had just recently presented itself.

Halfway, Kiesha told herself, another second and she would be there. Out of the corner of her eye she saw it. The massive blob of green, growing bigger every millisecond, crackling so loudly, she couldn't even hear the loud firing of John's magnum, sparks of supercharged energy lashed back and forth across the surface of the orb as it closed in.

_One chance! _Kiesha shouted in her mind. Taking one more step, the determined marine shoved off the floor with all her might, leaping the last ten feet, headfirst. With a loud _Clang! _Kiesha's chest plate made contact with the floor, the young woman skidding several feet before stopping her momentum. A little sore from the impact, the soldier stood up against the supply cabinet. Panting slightly from the exertion, Kiesha slowly made her way down the long cabinet, which stretched almost the entire length of the room. The opposition was hunkered down at the opposite end. Kiesha moved from the cabinet to a small stack of boxes, placing herself between them and the wall. Looking back, she saw a blackened crater in the wall, outlined with red, tendrils of smoke rising gently. Kiesha didn't even want to think about how it would have felt to be hit by that thing.

John dropped the spent magazine and slid in another, cocking the weapon, and preparing to fire. Suddenly, the audible sound of an opening door caught his attention. Quickly raising the magnum in front of him, John sighted the elevator door. It was vacant. _What the_, John thought.

"Don't shoot, I'm friendly," a voice from the elevator called out. Lowering his weapon slightly, the marine exhaled.

Kiesha moved along behind the crates until she reached the corner of the room. Concealed in the shadows, she peered up and spied the covenant she came for. Without even thinking, Kiesha brought up her sub-machine gun with both hands, and opened up.

The elite was about to send another volley of fire downrange when his shields flickered to life. The sound of bullets ricocheting off of metal shrieked in the elites ears as his shield rapidly decreased. Turning to the left, the elite saw the source of the gunfire, a cloud of orange fire radiating just a few meters away. Then in a flash of light, his shields died.

The bullets pinged against his armor, punching through as one bullet after the other piled up on top of each other. They began biting him, burning into his flesh. Screaming in agony, the elite desperately raised his plasma rifle to attempt a counterattack but it was swatted out of his hands by the sheets of lead. Blood splattered the wall and floor and the elite fell to his knees. Vision blurring, dozens of hot lead pieces embedded in his flesh, the elite got one final glance at his killer.

Then without any more control, he fell forward onto the blood slicked floor, the collision knocking the last bit of consciousness from him, and putting him out of the war.

The moment the elite fell, the jackal came into view. The weapon red hot and smoking from the rapid use, without the protective gloves Kiesha wore, she would have been burned. The jackal began to shift its shield toward the new threat, as Kiesha took aim.

She squeezed the trigger and was rewarded with an ironic click. _No, I'm out! _Kiesha screamed in her mind. A split second before the female soldier ducked behind the crate, the bright strobe of a yellow tracer knifed through the air. Passing through the jackal, a loud spurt of liquid sounded in Kiesha's ears. A gout of purple issued from the jackals side and it collapsed to the floor, dead, its shield deactivating with a low whistle.

"Was that Ramos?" Kiesha said to herself as she ejected her empty magazine onto the floor. Stepping around the dead elite, and into the open, she looked down the aisle at John's hiding place. When he emerged, Kiesha realized that he wasn't alone; a second man was supporting him. He had a smoking battle rifle hanging against his chest. Kiesha quickly strolled over to the pair, excited over the new marine.

"Damn, I'm glad to see another human, Kiesha said as she introduced herself. "Same here," said Michael as he extended a hand.

"Names Private first class Kiesha Barker, sir," she said, graciously accepting the hand shake. "Glad to meet you, I'm Corporal Michael Grant," he replied. Placing John down against the supply cabinet, the trio began to immediately exchange information.

"Barker and I are from the 128th Infantry Brigade, we were assigned to the bridge, but it got pretty ugly," John began.

"What a coincidence, I'm from the 128th also, assigned to guard an airlock, but like you two, it got ugly," said Michael. "We were displacing and falling back, losing guys until it was just a few of us left. In the confusion I took cover in a closet and I don't know what happened to the rest of my platoon." "Retreat is insane after all, we all got split up."

John took a deep breath, "well we were trying to get back into the bridge, it was breached some time ago, and the covenant has it holed up."

"Yeah, I was worried about that, I was trying to figure a way in also, so I could access the naval band of communications, and try and figure out just how bad the situations gotten," Michael continued.

"What I'm wondering," Kiesha began, "is why they haven't blown up the entire station yet. "When this whole thing started, they were destroying entire platforms with some sort of high yield bomb, according to reports."

"Maybe they want this station for some reason; I was watching the battle earlier through a window and didn't see a single orbital MAC cannon destroyed," John said.

Then, from a random thought, it hit Michael. "I know what they're trying to do," Michael said ominously, "They are trying to take control of the guns so that they can fire them on our own ships," he said in a single breath.

"Are you serious?" Kiesha said rhetorically. "They must be, that's why they have locked themselves into the bridge and haven't simply blown up the station, they must still be trying to overcome the stations AI," Michael said.

The group sat, silently for a moment, each comprehending what Michael had just concocted.

Breaking the silence, John spoke: "Our objective is clear then: take back the bridge and prevent these alien bastards from making fools

out of us by using our own guns."

"We can't, its impossible for just the three of us to do it, they must have at least an entire platoon in there," Michael said.

"What about the rallying point sir?" Kiesha said, looking to John. "Yes, I was just thinking about that, if anyone is still alive they are probably there. "Rallying point?" Michael questioned.

"Yes, before the fight our Company Commander told us that if we ever lost contact with each other, and things got too hairy, to regroup back at our barracks," Kiesha answered. "Yes the bravo company barracks is on the third deck, right above the armory, we should make our way there.

Kiesha walked over to the bleeding corpses of the covenant and stopped over the bodies. "Anything we can use," John called over to her. Kiesha crouched down, reached over the elite's body, and picked up its plasma rifle. "Well this things no good, scrapped by the bullets," the marine reported.

Michael walked over to the jackal and slid the large disk off its wrist. "This thing could come in handy," Michael said, wrapping it around his own wrist.

Kiesha peered at him and scrunched up her nose. "What's so funny," Michael said, catching her look from the corner of his eye.

"It's just that that thing looks so stupid on your wrist like that," she replied.

Feeling smug, the young marine quickly made an observation: "I suppose the top brass has made that happy face bandanna regulation, eh," he said, pointing to the fabric wrapped around Kiesha's forehead. "Excuse me sir but I'll let you know-," she was cut off.

"Marine stow that attitude, and same for you corporal," John said authoritively. "Maintain discipline, and bicker when you are not in any form of uniform." "Toss me that plasma pistol Grant," he added.

Scooping up the weapon, Michael tossed it to the man a bit puzzled. "What do you plan to use that for sir," he asked. Raising the plasma pistol in his left hand, and the magnum in the other, the noncom answered back: "You know what they say, two pistols are better then one."

* * *

>The three marines clambered into the elevator. The same feeling of confinement came to Michaels senses. It had been bad enough when he was alone, now he had two other people with him; each square inch they took up made the choke point more effective. So he decided to voice his thoughts:<p><p>

"This elevators a pretty nasty choke point, don't you think sir?" the marine said casually to Sergeant Ramos.

"I've noticed soldier, but we don't have much of a choice now do we,

better to take the direct route downward then to navigate the halls to find a set of stairs, who knows how many covenant we could have encountered," the man replied.

He was right Michael concluded, but having the burly man draped over his shoulder didn't exactly ease the feeling of vulnerability.

Turning to the wounded Sergeant, Michael shrugged him slightly, noticing his head was beginning to lower. "Don't fall asleep now sir," Michael said.

Snapping back up, the sergeant didn't even say a word, just mumbled some sort of incoherent noise. His head lowered again, but he fought to keep it up. _He's weakening, _Michael thought. Michael had one of the mans arms wrapped around his neck for support and he could feel the soldier becoming increasingly heavy as he began to become more and more incapable of holding himself up.

The marine corporal looked straight ahead at the woman facing him. She too noticed the Sergeant's nature. A look of uneasiness began creeping upon her features.

"He'll be fine, we'll get him patched up when we get to the barracks," Michael said. Kiesha nodded slightly but her expression only seemed to worsen.

With a tell tale whoosh, the elevator door opened. Kiesha stuck her head out into the hallway and looked both ways quickly, then drawing her SMG, stepped out.

Michael preceded with John heavy but still conscious enough to raise his magnum with his free hand.

"It's this way" Kiesha said, checking her PDA. She quickly sprinted down the hall and peered around the corner when she came to a T intersection.

Michael hefted John and proceeded after her.

"This way," Kiesha shouted, as she ran down the hall.

"Barker wait, we have a wounded man here," Michael called out to her, attempting to catch up.

"I know, and we need to get him treated fast or else he won't make it," Kiesha yelled over her shoulder, a tone of anger in her voice. Too weak to speak now, John, focused all his energy on his two legs, willing them to go faster, and ease this marine's load.

_Need to hurry, need to move faster, need to get John help, _Kiesha repeated over and over in her mind.

She raced through a doorway, and sidestepped a storage crate.

_Damn it marine, _Michael thought. He couldn't even see her anymore, as he stumbled through the automatic door. Turning to the left he caught site of Kiesha, at the opposite end of the hall. He was about to make another attempt to call out to her, but the words hadn't even formed in his mind as he watched the young woman get swatted to the

floor.

Kiesha felt as though she had run straight into a lamp post, a surface against her chest as solid as steel. The invisible force had hit with so much force, Kiesha felt the dent form in the center of her chest plate, the metal bending like clay. Unable to control her own physics, the marine did a complete spin in the air, her feet not even touching the floor.

One second she was looking at the ceiling and then another, the floor was racing toward her face. Reflexively, she brought her hands up to break her fall. She slammed into the metal, her head snapping forward, the lip of her helmet made contact with the floor, stopping Kiesha's face from meeting the cold hard metal. Vision blurring, the marine couldn't feel her body, and she knew it was the end.

John watched the marine go down and knew exactly what was happening. Before Michael had even had time to move, the veteran soldier raised his magnum with all the strength he could muster, and squeezed the weapon. The trigger that had felt so light in the past now seemed unmovable, but he had to pull it. The years went by in his mind, John thought of the amazing things he had done, his strength pulling him through, unfailing every time.

And now, he needed that strength more than ever, to save the life of his marine, he pulled back the trigger spring. Once, twice, three times, each shot rattling his arm, sapping the energy from him, but still he fought. Dropping to his knees, he brought his other arm to support his weapon.

The air above Kiesha exploded with color. The electric blue netting of a stealth elite's shield flared to life as the high caliber rounds hammered against it. Diverting his attention from the downed prey at his feet, the elite shifted to the priority threat.

With no time to fumble for his rifle, Michael reached for his magnum, the man down on his knees next to him, now yelling loudly. Then from the flashing shimmer of light down the hall, came several additional flashes. The plasma streaked at John, still firing and yelling at the top of his lungs.

Michael could do nothing but watch as the blue streaks slammed into the marine, splashing like water on impact and washing over his body. The impact forcing the marine backwards, off balance, the yelling ceased and his face turned to Michael.

Michael peered at him for an instant. His expression wasn't pained, in fact he didn't even wear one, his eyes weren't looking at Michael, and instead they were staring past him, at something that Michael wasn't aware of. Then his face disappeared in the sea of scorching blue plasma.

His body mutilated and burned, the marine slammed against the floor. Michael was not even looking however, all his attention was on the shimmering figure some sixty feet down the hall.

The elite's shield at a critical level, it turned to take cover. Michael fired a single round. The bullet struck the elite's shield, a centimeter from his face. His shield nearly gone, the elite could actually see the bullet, literally floating in the air, and spinning

rapidly. The elite couldn't close his eyes. The momentum of the round was too much however and the moment the last bit of shield gave way, the bullet disappeared into the elite's eye, punching out the other side, and ricocheting off a bulkhead.

The elite collapsed, dead, he had actually seen the bullet that had taken its life.

Michael holstered the smoking pistol. He looked down to the heap below him. Charred and disfigured the man was no longer recognizable. Averting his gaze, the strong soldier ran down the hall, hoping he still had a companion.

3. Regroup

I appreciate the reviews. Reader feedback is a key source of information for me after all. Anything that you readers like to comment on, criticism, complaints, I'll be sure to take into account. Rest assured, your opinions will help me in future chapters.

* * *

>He didn't want to be alone again.<p><p>

Michael completed the halls length and stooped down next to the fallen marine, who was laying face down. He was about to turn her over when she shuddered.

Kiesha quickly got up to her elbows and knees, her head hung loosely, her eyes closed.

"Barkerâ€|" Michael began but was cut off. "Shhhh," Kiesha slurred quietly.

Michael simply complied, sat back on his heels, and didn't say a word. _She's still in shock from the blow,_ he reasoned. _She just needs time to let her senses reorient themselves, any other outside stimuli would just frustrate her condition. _Michael had been in shock before and it wasn't exactly enjoyable.

Your senses basically get overloaded, your vision becomes distorted, when you hear something it sounds like your underwater, you can't feel much of anything either. He knew that the best thing was to just let her be until the feeling subsided. The blow seemed pretty bad but her armor had protected her. Michael noticed the large dent in the center of her chest plate, but he concluded that she hadn't been harmed internally, other than a small bruise.

Breathing deeply, Kiesha blinked twice. Then she slowly opened her eyes, and sat backwards on her butt.

"You okay," Michael asked. Kiesha turned to her left quickly and looked at him quickly. "Yeah-yeah, I'm fine," she replied, her voice sounding stable enough.

"Good, you don't seem to be severely injured, so let's keep going," the corporal said, standing up and offering her a hand. "Hold on, where's John," she asked, still a little shaky.

Michael heaved a sigh, and sat back to the floor, knowing what was coming next, and already preparing. He firmly grasped Kiesha's shoulders as she caught sight of the charred heap down the hall. Before she could even open her mouth Michael was in her face. "Don't say a word," he said, the tears already welling up in the corners of her eyes.

"But-but, I," she mumbled. "I said don't speak," Michael repeated firmly. Getting angry now, the young soldier tried to get up, but already having a strong grip on her, Michael pressed her back down. "Let go," she said angrily.

"No, sit and listen," he said. "Don't go to him, I won't let you, because there is nothing for you there. If you go and grieve in the past, you will never move onto the future," the marine managed to get out before the girl below him could object again.

"You need to move forward, and survive, you're still alive so get up and continue on, don't look back," Michael continued. "Time is short; don't let your emotions distract you. Grieve later," he concluded.

Kiesha stared up at him, eyes still moist and her body trembling. Fists clenched she was on the brink of knocking the man straight flat. Then unexpectedly she softened. She closed her eyes and released her anger. He was right. Going against the logic would simply make her appear ignorant.

She reopened her eyes and stared long and hard at Michael. His grasp on her shoulders fell away and his hands went back to their sides. Kiesha broke the gaze, bent down, picked up her SMG and turned to face the dead elite at her feet. Michael expected her to do something rash like shoot the body, but to his surprise, she simply stepped past it and walked to the door, that would lead to the next chamber.

She stopped and turned: "well, let's go then," she said enthusiastically. Without another word, the marine sprang to his feet and the pair proceeded.

* * *

>The pair entered the next chamber, cautiously, scanning the room briefly. Splitting up Michael headed to the left and Kiesha to the right. The room was full of collapsible shields, barriers the marines could quickly setup and move for temporary defense.<p><p>

It seemed as if the room was as vacant of activity as it was sound. But then something caught the corner of Michael's eye as he slid along the left wall.

A trail of blue was streaked along the floor, extending all the way to the next, closed door. There had been fighting the marine proposed, they were getting close to the barracks anyway.

But then a thought dawned on him like a needler to the gut. _What if when they got to the barracks, everyone there had already been killed? What if behind this next door, they found a slaughter? _The possibility hadn't even been apparent to the marine until just now. If there are no survivors, what would be the next step?

Michael looked up from his thoughts, and across the room. Kiesha was giving a hand signal. Understanding she probably had spotted the trail of blood as well; he registered the signal to "move slowly" and complied. The pair crept towards the automatic door.

One design flaw of these doors was that when anyone got close enough, they would whoosh open automatically. This was a double edged sword after all, as while the function is convenient when moving quickly from room; it is not very practical in a combat situation. If individuals got too close to the door and it opened before they were properly positioned, the enemy on the other side would have, literally, a free shot.

When he was about four feet from the door, expectantly it opened automatically.

Immediately the pair was graced with the sight of a dead grunt, to whom belonged the trail of blood which had originally aroused the marine's suspicions.

Michael pulled out his optic cable once again and edged it around the side of the corner, not wanting to be surprised again. What he saw made him shudder slightly.

It looked like the devil himself had paid a visit to this particular hall, as the sight that presented itself was truly hellish. The first thing was the blood. The halls were painted with the bright shades, blue, purple, and red. It was not only on the floor, either, no; it covered the walls _and _the ceiling. Lumps in the smooth surface of the walls and ceiling were what Michael could have only guessed, chunks of flesh.

Corpses littered the floor, elites, jackals, grunts, and marines, many of which were not in one piece. Michael stepped into the hall, followed slowly by Kiesha. Kiesha, who had assumed her big, tough, professional, soldier attitude a few minutes ago, quickly lost it when she saw the sight. Bending over, she covered her mouth with one hand and wretched.

The entrance to the Bravo Company barracks was down the carnage-filled hall.

Michael took a single step onto the dried blood, which in many places had turned a dark, blackish color, probably when the blood of two of the various species present had mixed. He then took a long step over the unmoving mass of a dead grunt, its body pocked with bullet holes.

Kiesha swallowed and stepped onto the mess. She really didn't want to look at the mixture under her feet, but she really didn't have a choice, lest she stumble over one of the carcasses.

Michael strolled past a dead marine, his head missing, and his body barely distinguishable as human. He did however manage to catch the 128th insignia on the side of his upper arm. _Shit. _He thought.

Taking a few more paces past a trio of dead grunts, and into a section of hallway that was covered in a black, charred residue,

Michael stopped down. The blackened area was probably from a grenade going off, as the smell was still heavy in the air.

Speaking of smells, the marine was relieved that the stench of death was not yet in the air. Since the atmosphere of the _Moscow _was incredibly sterile and free of bacteria, as all orbital platforms were, decomposition really hadn't taken any affect on the bodies yet.

Michael stopped. B Company, Panther Battalion barracks, read the small print on the top of the locked door.

Kiesha quickly emerged quickly and began fumbling for something in her hip pack. Michael could tell she was anxious to get in, anxious to see her comrades again. "Only my security card will open it, she said, this is after all my company," Kiesha stated, as she got out the small piece of plastic.

The _Moscow _was one of the oldest orbital defense platforms in existence and was still being refitted with the modern palm scanners, most other UNSC structures and ships employ. Until then however, they had to rely on these ancient key cards to get around. With a swipe of the card, Kiesha, a small grin on her face, lowered her arm as the door parted open.

She was met with a pistol to the forehead.

* * *

>For a few seconds, neither marine moved, Michaels eyes still focused on the weapon that had just appeared. His eyes slowly made their way down the arm connected to the weapon and ended up at the head.<p><p>

A pale, sweat laced face, short brown hair covered the top of the figures head.

"Easy marine, were humans," Michael said, moving his hands up slowly, in a gesture for the marine to lower his weapon. He expected the gun to be withdrawn immediately, as it was probably just a reflex from the soldier, however, the weapon remained stiff. Kiesha reacted at this moment: "Yeah, Tom, its just me remember?" There was no fear in her voice. The marine slowly lowered his weapon.

Michael let out his breath and at that moment noticed a few additional faces, behind the sweating face of their greeter. The marine finally got a hold of just how odd the situation seemed. They should be rejoicing that they had found additional company, however the air was awkwardly silent. _What had happened to these marines?_

Footsteps broke the silence, and the crowd parted, to allow the moving figure through. Kiesha too had sensed something amiss but just couldn't quite place it. The figure stopped and crossed his arms. "Well, soldiers, why are you just standing there, come on in and close that door," the man said brightly. Turning once more, the man began in the other direction. Michael and Kiesha quickly stepped in and closed the hatch behind them.

"It's good to see you again, Barker," the man with the pistol said.

"Yeah, glad to have another bravo," another added. Michael slowly made his way past several people still a bit confused. Every person in here seemed artificial, as if they had no personality.

The barracks was a long hall, bunks, stacked, two high, were located on both sides of the narrow passage. Marines lay in a few of the bunks, their eyes briefly glancing at the movement that shuffled by. The friendly man stopped and sat on one of the bunks. He motioned for Kiesha and Michael to sit on the opposite bunk.

"Sir what's going on here?" Kiesha blurted out quickly. Michael noticed the rank of 1st sergeant on the man's upper arms.

The man let out a sigh so slight, Michael barely caught it. "It's been hell," he said in a low voice. "Waves of them, swarming us, ripping, biting with their bare teeth and claws," he began. "I have always seen the covenant as somewhat civil in combat, but this time" "They were like animals, no coordination, or intelligence in their actions, just ferocity," the sergeant shuddered. "Many of them simply dropped their weapons and charged us, tearing at whatever they could get a hold of."

A bit taken aback by what the soldier was saying, Michael began to think instantly, considering countless possibilities as the marine kept talking.

"They were so fast, it was frightening," he continued. "We pulled back and locked ourselves in the barracks," he seemed to freeze. His face scrunched up slightly and his head lowered. He seemed as though the words were caught up in his throat, and he was fighting to get them out. "We-we were so taken with fear, we just" he cleared his throat, shuffling some more on the bunk.

"Sir, Hudson, what happened," Kiesha said, placing her head close to the trembling marines face.

He looked up at her, eyes on the verge of tears. Kiesha was a bit shocked at the sight. In all the time she had known her 1st sergeant, he had never once displayed this level of emotion.

He took a deep breath, and spoke: "We shut our own men out. We wouldn't let them in for fear of facing the covenant. They begged us, they banded and yelled for us to open that door, but we were just too overcome with fear," He choked out. "Then the covenant came, shrieking like they were possessed, and all we could do was listen"

The man stopped and cupped his face in his hands. "We had barricaded the door so the only way to open it was by force. Only when we were sure that the covenant had gone did we remove the barricade and check the hall," he concluded.

Michael was speechless. From what this man was saying, these marines, these men, were still in shock from the ordeal. But what could've made the covenant so monstrous that they had frightened hardened marines senseless? Would these men even be able to fight? Michael knew what had to be done however; he needed to restore these marines morale. He prayed that they weren't so far gone that they couldn't be persuaded to even fight. He needed them after all, either that, or he would have to find some more, stable, soldiers.

The sergeant, his face still obscured, sat silently on his bunk, Kiesha talking to him slowly, trying to offer some consoling. Michael stood up, catching the young woman's attention in doing so. He gestured with his head to follow him. She complied and stood up.

The pair walked too the very end of the barracks, out of earshot of the dreary marines. In a low voice Michael began: "So what do you think?"

Kiesha was silent for a moment, as if in deep thought, trying to formulate just the right words to describe her thoughts. "I think that I'm glad to have some more marines to help with our mission," she said. "I don't think that there is any physical scarring on their minds, their just scared from the experience. All we have to do is help them get their confidence back," she concluded.

She had laid down the facts as clearly as he would have. Michael quickly ran his eyes down the long hall, counting its occupants.

Thirteen, there's thirteen of them, including Sergeant Hudson. Michael figured the fifteen of them in total would be enough to retake the bridge, that is, if they were willing to.

In this kind of situation rank didn't even matter anymore. 1st Sergeant Hudson was technically in command, but was no more mentally fit then any other marine in the barracks aside from Michael and Kiesha. Command was left to the clearest and most rational thinker, and regardless of rank, Michael was it.

He thought then, of words that would sooth the fears of the men in this dark, secluded hall. It was the only way that they would have a fighting chance. Thoughts still bustling about in his mind, Michael proceeded down the hall, past Sergeant Hudson, who was still deep in thought.

He walked down the hall until he was in the center of the dreary soldiers.

"Who here is a marine?" Michael called out loudly, breaking the dull silence. The men around him remained silent, a little surprised by the sudden action. "I'll say it again, who is a marine here?" Michael repeated just as loudly. The soldiers continued to stare at him, until a hint of movement got the groups attention.

A figure, now standing, gingerly raised his arm into the air. Michael looked at the man. He was young, no more then sixteen, he figured. "What's your name private," Michael said to the young soldier. "It's Brown sir, David Brown," he responded.

"One true marine eh, that's pathê| " Michael was cut off.

"Check yourself corporal," a deep voice boomed from behind Michael, causing him to turn quickly. He was met by the sight of a man nearly six inches taller then himself. "Every one of these men is marines, and I don't know who you think you are questioning them," he said in a low tone, almost threateningly. Not the least bit intimidated, Michael quickly responded: "With all respect sergeant, I would like to hear these 'marines' talk for themselves."

The man seemed to get angrier. "I'm their platoon leader, _I _speak for them," he said.

Michael turned from the fuming man and back at the cluster of soldiers behind him. A second man stood, hand rose defiantly. "I don't know what you're trying to prove sir, but I won't be called into question, the private first class said. No sooner had the words been uttered that a third then a fourth figure arose.

Kiesha walked over to the cluster of marines and sat down on a vacant bunk, fascinated by the scene.

"Don't feel guilty about your actions. There is no point in doing so. You cannot change what has already happened, so don't waste your life thinking that another course of action would have been better," Michael said, now that he had the marine's full attention.

"Fear may still have a grip on you but you need to fight it, overcome it and you will win. Focus on staying alive. Remember this, you are all still in a combat zone. So you all should still be in combat mode."

The thirteen soldiers around him were all as still as stone, quiet as the vacuum of space. Michael's words beginning to set in.

The lumbering sergeant behind Michael seemed to shrink slightly as his anger did as well. "I was never afraid in the first place," he mumbled. Sergeant Hudson finally arrived on the scene and looked down at Kiesha.

"Exactly where did you find this guy?" He asked her.

"Oh just wandering the station sir," she replied.

4. Assault on The Control Room

"Five battle rifles, four sub-machine guns, a shotgun, a .50 caliber machine gun, ten concussion grenades, seven fragmentation grenades, nine plasma grenades, two plasma rifles, a needler, three magnums, six plasma pistols, five combat knives, as well as three portable energy shields we got from the jackals," Hudson said in a single breath.

The marines in the bravo company barracks all were huddled around the lounge, connected to the end of the bunk hall.

"About sixty rounds for each BR, and eighty for each SMG. Twenty shells for the shotgun, and around two hundred rounds for the fifty caliber," he added."

Hudson thought to himself about the situation they were in. _Taking the bridge back is the top priority, that's certain. Not only do we need to stop the taking of this platforms gun, the bridge will give us access to the earth communication band. _

"The layout of the bridge dictates the best strategy," Hudson said, observing the hologram that projected from his PDA. "There are two platforms on either side of the room, overlooking the main floor. If

we take both platforms, we will have the advantage of elevation over the covies' below," the man said, pointing at the luminescent model rotating in front of him.

"Two teams then, alpha and bravo, seven men in each, too take over each platform," Sergeant Harris said, arms crossed. His recent anger towards Michael's previous provocation had vanished now that he had battle strategies to occupy his attention.

"Of course, sergeant," Hudson replied. "There is a single doorway to each platform, and two more on the main floor, as well as a gate on the southern end. Ferry B also runs its track through the bridge and connects at the west platform," Hudson continued.

Michael stood next to Sergeant Hudson, examining the floating hologram.

"Sir the covenant has the bridge locked down from every direction, if my assumption is correct," Michael stated. "Were going to need some breaching charges, to get in," he said. Michael never really like making assumptions, he only did so when proper deduction allowed.

"I'm aware of that corporal," Hudson stated. "Hopefully Barker and Tucker located something in the armory," he added.

Michael looked up at the marines around him, crowded around the table, littered with weapons. For hours he had been alone in the dark, corpse just feet from him. Now he was among live soldiers, the sound of their voices was such a contrast from the dark closet he had spent nearly three hours in. His sense of survival was waning slightly; he could feel it, since he was now in the presence of additional soldiers. There was no longer as great a need for scrutiny now that he had some eyes behind him.

It may sound like a bad way to think, but he couldn't help the feeling.

Michael's thoughts were interrupted though, as his last name was called out: "Corporal Grant," Hudson's voice echoed loudly in the confines of the lounge.

"Yes sir," he responded.

"Stop your day dreaming and focus. You will be in command of Bravo team," Hudson said.

"Privates Brown, Chrisano, Baker, Long, Sanchez, and Pham will be yours to command," he said sharply. "You will infiltrate from door 7AK, and onto the Western platform," the sergeant added.

"Yes sir!" He replied.

So he was in command of a squad. Just like that. Well it's not as if he wasn't prepared. At least now he was the one calling commands, and the sense of control helped to reassure him.

The appearance of motion down the hall causes the group to all turn their attention. The barracks door whooshed open, and in strides Barker and Tucker. Private Tucker had a small case cradled in his

arms. The pair walked over to the table, and promptly set the box down amongst the various weapons.

"Status report Barker," Hudson said quickly, eyeing the box.

"Well sir, the armory was pretty near bone clean but we did manage to find this," she said slapping her hand on the plastic crate, the label of which was smeared with dried purple blood. "M145 Breaching charges, low yield, three of them," she said triumphantly.

"Good work," the 1st sergeant replied. "We know have a way to crack that bridge."

Michael glanced at the charges as Kiesha removed one from the crate, and then to the six men he would be commanding. Everyone one of them was focusing on table that was after all where all the planning was happening. Each one of their faces was pretty impassive, as they listened to Sergeant Hudson. The upcoming assault would be tough. Michael knew that not all of them were going to make it out alive. It would have to take some miracle for that.

He eyed each one of them. A chill went down Michael's spine as he thought of the cosmic forces at work here. Each of these marines was listening, thinking of the battle ahead. Many of the men before him were actually fresh recruits, privates and private first classes. He couldn't say for sure whether or not any of them had yet considered the possibility of death in this upcoming assault.

It was odd. A soldier knew that he had a grave chance of dying in his profession and yet, when he finally went into battle, and people were being killed all around him, he didn't once consider the possibility that he would be one of the ones killed.

Perhaps it's our nature of individuality. The thought that because you are "you" you cannot die in such a meaningless way. It was difficult for Michael to put his own thought into words, but it didn't really matter of course, unless he had to explain it to someone. Anyway, the chill remained. If one was so expectant that they will live through a battle, and yet end up being killed, the emotional distress that must be felt right before death must be inconceivable.

Aw crap, I'm rambling to myself again, Michael thought. He had to pay attention to the briefing. The six soldier's faces remained in front of him though. With a small bit of thought, Michael quickly picked which faces he thought would live through this fight, and which would die.

"Alright marine's, load up and prepare to move out. Take as much equipment as possible; we don't know how many enemies we'll be going up against," Hudson called.

David Brown was nervous. How else could he describe it, the action on this station marked his first experience in actual combat and he wasn't exactly feeling too brave about know. He wouldn't deny it. He was indeed a coward. He joined the marines because of the academic scholarships it provided. Soldiers were needed, but those soldiers needed equipment to do their jobs. David wanted to be the one to create that equipment.

His designated team leader was now walking over to his location. The man still puzzled David immensely. David knew that he himself would never have the courage to attempt to motivate a group of battle shocked marines. But this man had done it, with only a few words too.

"Marines," Michael said, addressing the six men before him. "If you don't already know, my name is Corporal Grant. Take what equipment you need. Sergeant Harris team will be taking the fifty cal with them, Brown, you have our breaching charge. David registered his name but seemed to drift out on the rest.

"Did you hear me marine," Michael snapped. Brown quickly analyzed the words Michael had previously stated and quickly replied: "Yes sir."

Brown proceeded to the weapons table and looked over it. A single battle rifle lay nearby. David's mind thought about taking the weapon. But as his hand was about to move, Michael gently lifted the rifle up and began looking over it. _Ok, _he thought to himself.

An M7 SMG sat nearby. _That'll do,_ he thought. Kiesha promptly picked up the gun and loaded it. _Damn it! _David said to himself. He looked up at the marines around him. Each one was inspecting, loading, and storing various items. Sergeant Hudson cocked the lone shotgun. Sergeant Harris was fiddling with a battle rifle, a plasma rifle already strapped to his hip. The table was becoming bearer by the second as Tom Leonard hefted the fifty caliber machine gun onto his shoulder.

Quickly reaching out with his left hand, David snatched up a concussion grenade, followed quickly by an M6C. Quickly loading the handgun and holstering it. The marine shoved an extra magazine into one of his empty hip pockets. He still needed some kind of primary weapon though.

He let out a frustrated sigh as his eyes scanned the near empty table, until his eyes fell onto one of the last remaining pieces of hardware: the single covenant needler.

Just my luck, he thought as he hefted the strange weapon. The pink, glowing projectiles protruding from the top of the weapon gave the marine an uncomfortable feeling, like if he moved the thing in the wrong direction he would stab himself. He had been trained in use of the weapon but didn't particularly favor it. The cylindrical containers that stored the crystalline needles were not located anywhere on the table. _So I have one magazine to bootâ€¦| perfect,_ the soldier sighed.

Finally, David grabbed the squads breaching charge, and stuffed it in his pack.

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* * *

>Time for action, Kiesha thought to herself as she made her way down the hall, weapon rose in front of her, searching for targets. Her team traveled in a straight line down the hall, she was second in the formation. In front of her was Ryan Lopez, behind her was Tom

Leonard, and behind him was Sergeant Harris.<p><p>_

The team rapidly moved down the hall and arrived at their destination. Without a word, Ryan removed the breaching charge from his backpack and moved toward the closed door.

The M145 was about the size of CD-ROM case and was designed to adhere to a set surface on command. Ryan placed the charge on the center of the door, right on the opening mechanism, and secured it in place. The squad had already taken a position behind the nearest bulkhead, only about fifteen feet away. Ryan, detonator in hand, took his place in front of Kiesha.

"Hey barker," Tom whispered to the young woman in front of him. "Yeah, what's up," Kiesha whispered back. "I just wanted to apologize for sticking that pistol in your face earlier," he said. "Don't worry about it-,"

"Hey, cut the chatter marines," Sergeant Harris slurred. The two promptly shut up.

Sergeant Hudson stood behind Sergeant Harris, a headset mic visible near his mouth. "Okay Bravo team, on my mark set off your charge and move in," he said in a low voice.

This is it, Kiesha thought to herself as she watched Ryan arm the detonator. She gripped her SMG tightly and prepared to move.

"Ready!" Hudson called out.

"Mark!" He shouted into the mic.

Ryan twisted the detonator and the silence in the air was shattered. BANG! The charge detonated in a flash of white and orange, small bits of black, twisted metal highlighted a thick plume of smoke that blossomed outward into the hall.

The white smoke raced towards the marines and surrounded them. Kiesha's vision blurred slightly as the warm smoke washed around the marines, the sound of the explosion echoing in her head. She could barely make out Hudson's voice as it sounded incredibly distant. Still, she understood the command to move and in seconds was rushing forward.

Ryan's outline was slightly visible in front of Kiesha as they made their way through the smoke and took a sharp left turn, right through the smoking doorway. The entire hatch had been ripped to pieces, leaving only a scorched outline on the door frame. Kiesha stepped through the door, heavy steam still awash all around her. She knew that she was in the control room now, and that the covenant was just feet away.

Dark patches of green and blue streaked through the fog around Kiesha. She ducked her head low as she felt a wet liquid slash against her shoulder. Then unexpectedly, an incredible weight seemed to topple directly onto her. She was pinned to the floor and began scrambling to get the mass off.

Plasma fire whined in her ears as the smoke cleared. She finally

managed to wrench herself free from Ryan's lifeless corpse. Figures ran past her, as she tried to reorient herself. She felt a firm grasp on her left arm and realized that she was being pulled.

The sight of a railing directly in front of her allowed her bearings to return. She was on the eastern platform of the bridge; the solid railing in front of her was part of that platform.

Just as the grip on her arm was released, she threw herself down, against the railing. She then fumbled with her weapon as gunfire exploded around her. "Fire your weapon Barker!" someone next to her shouted. Without even looking at the figure crouched nearby, she rose up over the parapet and took in the scene below.

The covenant were scrambling like ants, only about twenty five feet below them. Grunts, jackals, elites, she caught sight of them all. They were all running for cover among the various control panels and raised objects. Some were already in place and firing back, some were still running, and some were simply on the floor panicking.

Kiesha shouldered her SMG and took aim at a grunts backside. The small alien was running in the opposite direction, its arms flailing in the air. Kiesha let fly and the grunt squealed as the 2mm rounds impacted against it. Blue streamed from the back of the red-clad alien as it was sent hurling forward from the force of the projectiles. Before the creature even landed on the floor, Kiesha sighted another target and opened up. She swept her weapon in a small arc from left to right. There were just so many targets.

Plasma washed against the top of the railing, sending Kiesha ducking back down.

"The fifty, get it up!" she shouted, to no one in particular. Tom suddenly came sprawling out in front of her, the heavy machine gun clanking to the floor in front of him. "I'm already on it," the private said to her, as he lifted the large weapon.

Needle thin fingers of green, knifed through the air above them, as Tom readied the weapon. He lifted with his knees and raised the machine gun onto the edge of the parapet. He glanced down at Kiesha as she looked up. She caught his eye. A round from a covenant carbine slashed through the air, struck his right shoulder and punched through both sides of his armor. A thin gout of blood spurted onto the railing as the marine fell backwards.

He slammed onto the deck, his head snapping forward. The machine gun clattered to the floor beneath his feet as more plasma splashed against the railing. Clenching his teeth, he grabbed the wound with his right hand. The radioactive round had pierced clean through and left him with an odd tingling sensation.

Kiesha was on all fours now, keeping her head down from the plasma lancing over top. She crawled over to the wounded soldier and shoved her ear up to his mouth. "The fifty, use it!" he managed to yell over the explosive noise of battle. Kiesha glanced at the weapon, on its side and waiting. She looked back at the soldier beneath her, his face coated in a thin sheen of sweat, and then at the marines lined up against the railing.

She could see Sergeant Harris yelling something in her direction but

couldn't make it out amidst the gunfire. Her eyes went back to the heavy weapon. She had to move. Crawling over to the gun, she winced as a loud explosion shook the room. The thing was heavy, but she knew that she could manage. Lifting the large gun over the railing, nozzle first, she grasped the handle with one hand and the top of the stock with the other.

Plasma rang all around her from the floor below. She pivoted the weapon downward and opened fire. Without any sort of brace or mount the crew-serve weapon was incredibly difficult to control on the flat surface that the railing provided. Kiesha struggled with the rattling weapon, aiming the best she could at the targets below.

Sparks erupted and panels blew off in fiery explosions. A trio of grunts jerked in place as the high caliber rounds ripped into their bodies, shearing off pieces of their armor and flesh. A jackal raised its shield in defense as the fiery marine guided the stream at it. The defense held for a few seconds, but inevitably the jackal lost its footing under the sheer weight of the bullets. Pushed back and off balance, the projectiles tore at the creature's body, ripping its arm off in an explosive burst of purple. The alien crumpled to the floor, still squawking.

Sergeant Hudson called out to the soldiers around him: "Move up! Get onto the deck and box them in!" A double flight of stairs connected the upper platforms to the main deck. The marines quickly moved from the protection of the railing and marched, running and gunning, down the first flight of stairs. Sergeant Harris crouched on the landing and fired off the remainder of his magazine at an elite, sending it stumbling into a flaming power node.

Across the raging battle, Michael's team was fighting just as hard. Michael spotted Harris team moving in and understood the thought behind the maneuver. "C'mon marines, lets go!" he called out. David was the closest to the stairs and pretended not to hear the order. Instead he waited for several other marines to run past him and then followed up the rear. Private Chrisano charged down the stairs, in the lead.

Plasma lanced at the moving marines. Blue bolts slammed against Chrisano's side, striking all the way up his neck and head. The marine screamed and fell forward tumbling the rest of the way down the stairs, coming to a hard stop on the landing.

Not stopping, the team ran down past the writhing marine and down the second flight of stairs, now on the main deck. A solid divider lay directly in front of them, just as planned, allowing the surviving soldiers cover from the vicious plasma. Michael slammed hard against the divider, immediately pulling a frag grenade from his belt. "Grenades, marines!" He shouted.

David hit the floor, sprawled out on his stomach and fumbled for his concussion grenade.

The strategy was working. If the covenant wanted to fire on Alpha team, they had to turn their backs to Bravo, thus leaving them exposed, and vice-versa. There were a few elites, however who had managed to find cover between two objects, protecting themselves from both teams.

Michael pulled the pin from his grenade, as the soldiers around him did the same. Counting to three, the soldier estimated the distance from the aliens, and heaved the metal sphere up and over the divider. In quick succession, the marines all tossed their explosive devices into the alien horde.

A line of explosions erupted along the covenant ranks. One of the grenades struck a jackal directly in the skull, throwing the creature, stunned, to the floor. The sphere detonated a half second later, vaporizing the alien. Grunts flew through the air and over the divider, trailing smoke and landing on the floor behind the marines.

An elite spotted one of the devices strike the floor near him. Attempting to shift his body weight in the opposite direction, he began a jump just as the grenade went off. The force of the explosion propelled him through the air, his shields disintegrating.

The elite rolled behind a control panel and out of the marine's line of fire.

By now David had wrenched the pin from his grenade, and heaved the weapon into the fray.

Lolamee yed' crouched behind the control panel, his shields at a critical level, and slowly attempting to recharge. He was alive though, thanks to his cat like reflexes. Lolamee knew that the humans would never take him down; if he was the last elite alive they would never kill him. His skill after all was simplyâ€| Lolamee's self-confidence boost was interrupted however, as a round, spherical, globe of metal dropped into viewâ€|

A low guttural cry was drowned out by the bang of the concussion grenade as it went off.

_Alright, it sounds like I got one, _David thought as he crawled over to the divider.

* * *

>Spent cartridges from the fifty caliber machine gun littered the floor around its operator's feet. There were only a few covenant, mainly elites, still alive, all of them huddled around the center of the control room. Kiesha let up on the trigger. She had to let the weapon cool before she could fire again or else the thing could actually start melting.<p><p>

Suddenly, a white armored elite stepped out from behind one of the center control panels, his hand glowing blue. Kiesha took aim at the new target and realized exactly what the alien was holding. While her mind was still formulating the situation, the elite heaved the plasma grenade. It zipped up at her in a gentle arc and impacted against the nozzle of the heavy weapon. A glowing blue ball of plasma whining up in front of her, Kiesha's thoughts raced.

She couldn't drop the gun on her team below, so that left one choice. The marine dropped the gun onto the floor of the platform, the grenade glowing a ghastly white, grabbed the railing and heaved herself over the side. She was still in the air and falling when the loud, static filled explosion sounded overhead. A cloud of blue and

white illuminated the platform as Kiesha made contact with the floor. She tucked her head forward and rolled, absorbing the impact as she had been taught.

Bits of metal zipped down and ricocheted on the floor around her, leaving small trails of smoke in their wake. Getting back to her feet, the feisty soldier ran to her team.

"There's only a few of them left," she overheard Hudson saying as she crouched down among the marines. "A captain elite is alive in there," Kiesha said quickly. For a split second, the sergeant showed a look of dismay. It vanished however, as he called an order into his mic for Bravo team to converge on the elites position. They were out of grenades and had to take that thing down by direct fire.

Michael turned to his team and spoke: "There's a Captain Elite hunkered down in that cluster of control stations over there," he said pointing. "He's the last thing that stands between us and winning this bridge!"

"So let's go get him!" He yelled in a motivating voice. The marines called back, vaulted over the divider and charged toward the center of the bridge, all except David of course. "What's wrong marine? Let's move," Michael said to the man still crouching on the floor.

Before the soldier could answer, Michael caught sight of Alpha team advancing on the elite's position from the other side. Forgetting about the soldier at his feet, Michael rushed off to help.

The marines closed in on the cluster of control panels that the elite was supposedly hiding in, but they saw no sign of him. Both teams stopped, about ten feet from the position.

The ambient noise of a few burning fires, licked at the marines ears as no one spoke a sound. Every eye was focused on the center of the room. A light haze of smoke hung in the air. Michael gripped his rifle tightly.

A loud snap sounded from the panels. The snap, Michael recognized, was of a covenant plasma sword. No sooner had this registered did the elite explode from the top of its hiding place. The creature propelled itself twenty feet into the air, armor glittering and sword radiating energy. The marines were still pivoting upward to track the elite, when it came thrusting back down.

In a loud, high pitched slash, sounding like a knife slicing through water, the elite landed on the floor, bringing its sword down, vertically upon the marine in front of him, bisecting the man. The elite dashed to the side, the marines shifted and tracked the agile monstrosity.

Its shields flared as the marines opened fire, bullets ricocheting at oblique angles. Sergeant Hudson ran forward, as the elite lunged at another target. His shotgun was almost touching the glowing, white shield of the creature, when the sergeant pulled the trigger. Fire erupted from the nozzle of the weapon; the loud metallic boom struck the elite. Pellets washed against the energy shield, but still, the elite did not fall.

The captain elite rotated his entire body rather than moving just his arm, sending his sword whipping around before Hudson could react. The weapon connected with his neck and Hudson went crashing to the floor, a wave of blood spurted from the elite's sword as the marine succumbed to the power of the energy weapon.

Michael fired the last round from his battle rifle and paused. Many of the marines had stopped firing for fear of hitting their own comrades, giving the elite the opportunity to lunge while they tried to think. The alien filled Michael's vision, the glowing plasma sword rushing at him. He wanted to get away, to keep the creature as far from himself as possible. He pitched backwards, not laying down, but simply throwing himself to the floor, not caring how hard his landing would be. Catching sight of the cumbersome disk still attached to his wrist, Michael let go of his rifle and threw his hand at the disk. He had one chance, if he missed the switch on the portable energy shield, he would not have time to try again.

The tip of his finger connected with the small button and the shield sprung to life. The device tugged at his arm as the orange shield solidified, just as the marine slammed onto the floor. Lying on his back, Michael immediately brought both of his legs up and pushed his feet against the inside of the shield, as the plasma sword came crashing down.

Tendrils of electricity slashed through the air as the two formations of energy collided. Sparks showered the floor around Michael's head as he pushed with every muscle in his body to keep the shield from crushing him. The elite's strength was insane, unlike anything he had ever felt before, a few more seconds of this pressure and he was sure that his arm was going to fold.

Shots rang through the air as Michael let out a yell of anger, the last ounces of his strength disappearing. The elite roared out as plasma and bullets slammed against his nearly depleted shield. Letting up his sword from the human beneath him, the elite turned in defiance at the marines around him. There were too many though. From all around him weapons flashed. He was vaguely aware that the shots were eating away at his body. So many pricks of pain from the searing plasma and red hot lead slamming against him, caused a sort of nirvana within his mind.

The elite's vision blurred and his hearing cut out. No longer able to feel his body, the alien leaned forward. The floor, covered in purple gore, came closer and closer to his face. Then the elite hit hard, dead, bleeding, and covered in dozens of bullet holes and plasma burns, bringing the frantic assault to an end.

The moment Michael felt the weight above him disappear, he let the energy shield drop to the floor. He sucked in as much air as his lungs could hold and then let it out as fast as he could. His muscles were numb and his body ached. _I bet I pulled something during that one, _Michael thought to himself.

He simply lay there, staring up at the ceiling, his mind blocking out the noise of shuffling marines around him. The bright overhead light glowed eerily overhead. He didn't like it. He felt that if he stared at it too long, he would never get up again.

Willing himself to move, the hardened marine bent forward and sat up.

Pain shot through his right arm. Slowly, he pulled off the portable shield that had saved his life, and tossed it onto the dead elite's body. He looked around the room. Marines were running, the wounded being treated. He saw Kiesha hauling a marine on her shoulder; he forgot the man's name.

His eyes shifted to the left and he caught sight of Sergeant Hudson's body. He lay, lifeless on the floor, ringed in a pool of blood. His neck had not been cut through completely and thus he was not truly decapitated. It reminded Michael of a character from some really old fairy tale about Wizards. Michael didn't even question why he was thinking of such a memory in this place in time.

"Are you okay, sir?" A voice next to Michael said unexpectedly.

He looked up and saw Private Francis Pham. "Yeah, I'm fine soldier, he said."

"We accessed the Earth Communication Band and it sounds like the covenant is retreating, we actually won, earth still lives," he added.

"Good to hear," Michael said. "I guess the covenant AI just wasn't able to overcome the stations," Michael thought out loud.

Shakily, he got to his feet and surveyed the room again. Sergeant Harris was apparently on Fleet COM, conversing with the other orbital defense platforms, and spacecraft. Michael walked over to one of the bridges massive glass windows that covered an entire wall. The glass was pocked with bullet holes and had several large craters where it had been scorched by plasma. Fortunately the glass was about a foot thick.

He looked out upon the scene.

Orbital defense platforms stretched out in a line as far as the eye could see, gently bending to follow the earth's curve. Ships of all sizes, destroyers, frigates, carriers, all of them could be seen in a large cluster away from the stations. Ships were already returning however, to be repaired and restocked. As per standard procedure, the most critically damaged ships would receive use of the premium docking space within the small number of service platforms.

Michael could see one of the platforms, a massive disk with a flat surface, being flocked by countless spacecraft. Pieces of debris littered the space around, chunks lazily floating by the station, to be burned up in the earth's atmosphere. It was a mixture of brown, and purple, both sides ships existed peacefully with each other only in death. Hundreds of thousands had undoubtedly been killed in the defense of the mother world.

The large hulks of UNSC ships and Covenant ships floated gently, dead in space, highlighted with dots of orange from a hundred different fires fueled by the ships leaking oxygen atmospheres. Salvage operations would begin immediately; any material that could be recycled should not be wasted after all.

So many were dead.

Why was he still alive? What gave him the right to live on anyway?

Fate was the only answer, a case of being in the right place at the right time. It wasn't a matter of skill or being a good soldier, it was all just luck; the luck of being on a ship that didn't get hit by one of a million shots. Michael hated those kinds of outcomes.

Michael turned back to the surviving marines before him, and the dead. He thought about his earlier guess of who would and would not die.

He had missed completely.

* * *

>I'm attempting to update this story every Friday from now on. So check back for updates around that time.<p><p>

5. Approach

They would be here soon.

Reinforcements would be arriving soon. There were still covenant lurking on the station, no doubt about that. The surviving Capital ships had no time to withdraw their troops from the stations before they jumped out of the system.

Michael didn't know when or if the covenant would make a counter attack on the bridge. It was unlikely; however it was still a possibility. A possibility that the marine didn't exactly feel prepared for. They were down to only ten men, less than a full squad.

Five men had been knocked out of the war during this assault. The body count for the covenant was fourteen grunts, five jackals, and four elites. They were down to using plasma weapons almost exclusively, as they had expended nearly every round of their own ammunition. The situation was not yet bleak however.

They were in direct contact with the rest of the fleet, but it would be a good forty five minutes before a full battalion could be rounded up and sent to secure the station. Once they arrived it would then take anywhere from two to six hours to search and clear anymore covenant resistance left. _And there is sure to be some_.

Michael looked down at the objects he had gathered in front of him; the lone shotgun, the hilt of the deactivated plasma sword, and an elite helmet.

He bent down and scooped up the oblong helmet. The thing was fairly heavy, about seven pounds, estimated the marine. He turned the helmet over in his hands a few times, careful not to pierce himself with the pointed tips. He stared inside the protective piece. It was lined with some sort of gray material, probably padding. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary until a small, raised stud, toward the rear of the helmet, caught the marine's attention.

Sitting down onto the cold steel floor and bringing the helmet closer to his face, Michael stared hard at the oddity. It appeared to conceal something in its center, some sort of needle. _Or a syringe,

_thought the marine, fascinated. He shoved his face deeper into the piece, trying to identify the devices purpose.

"You trying to put that thing on," a smug voice said in front of Michael.

He quickly brought his face back up to reality and was met by the livid eyes of PFC Barker.

"I'll disregard that remark, private, if you tell me your opinion on what this may be," he quickly replied, snapping the helmet up to the woman's face. She promptly took hold of the object and stared inside of it. "That stud in the rear," Michael said.

Kiesha caught sight of it and scrunched up her nose. She peered closer to the stud, much like Michael a moment ago. Curious, she brought up her left hand and extended her index finger to touch it.

"Maybe you shouldn't do that Barker," Michael said quickly, Kiesha's finger inches from the bump. "That thing looks like some sort of syringe, and I personally would not want to be injected with whatever it holds," he added.

The marine hesitated for a moment and then moved her hand away. She took the object in both palms and slumped down onto the floor next to Michael, continuing to stare at the helmet.

"Well if it is what you say it is, what do you think they would use it for?" She asked. "Medication, nutrients possibly; I don't recall ever hearing Intel on an injection system like this though," he replied.

Kiesha set the helmet down on her lap and reached for the hem of her right glove. Slipping her thumb under the thin piece of material, she pulled the glove off and ran the palm of her bare hand over the top of the white elite helmet. Michael turned his head, curious of the soldier's actions. The white armor was speckled with dried dots of purple, and had a dent on the temple where a bullet had struck. Michael looked up at the marine's face. She appeared impassive; gazing at the helmet like it contained some sort of deeply sought after secret.

"Do you hate the covenant?" She asked abruptly.

A bit surprised by the question, Michael let his values guide his words. "Well, I believe it is a bad to 'hate' anything; I mean I dislike the covenant, but I can't say that I hate them."

"Why though, I mean, couldn't you make one exception in this case, you could hate the covenant. Nobody would ever question you," she said, not taking her eyes off the helmet.

"I suppose. I mean I have every reason to hate them, as most would say," Michael thought out loud. "But it's more of a spiritual thing," he said.

"How so?" the woman asked, breaking the gaze on the piece in front of her to look at Michael.

"Well hate is one of those emotions that result in another emotion: anger. Anger is something that I believe is a killer. I mean so many people have died pointlessly because anger overtakes them, and clouds their own thoughts."

"There's no need for anger. It just gets in the way. That's why I think it's so stupid that people end up getting shot because they get angry at another guy for something completely worthless, like his pride."

"You mean, you don't care if someone insults you?" Kiesha said, now very interested in what the young man next to her was saying.

"Well, I hate to burst your bubble now that you're interested, Barker, but I have already said too much," Michael stated bluntly, standing up.

"Oh come on, what's that supposed to mean, when you start a conversation with someone, you don't just stop when you have the persons attention," the woman said, standing up defiantly. She was nearly a head shorter then Michael.

Michael looked down at the marine, amused at her reaction.

"Hmm, I'll tell you what," Michael said, taking a few steps forward. "If you make it out of this station alive, we can continue our conversation."

Kiesha flinched slightly at his words.

"So morbid, jeez, it's not good for moral," Kiesha said. "I'm getting out of here alive, whether you do or not; not like I even _care _about your views," she said, turning the other way. "Whatever you say, private," Michael said, walking towards a group of resting marines.

"Fine," she huffed. And with that she walked off, to another group of soldiers, dropping the white armored elite helmet to the floor with a loud clang.

* * *

>The Pelican drop ship sailed as smooth as satin as it made its way across the sea of debris that floated through this dark empty void of space. Reilly McNeil enjoyed and distained space flight at the same time. It was a very relaxing experience that riding in a turbulent less vacuum provided, however the lack of feeling and sound would drive her nuts over long missions without cryo.<p><p>

The drop ship was crowded with soldiers, two full squads, and kit all crammed in together. "Were going in blind, aren't we Joe," she said in the direction of her squad leader. She couldn't see his face in the crowd but she knew that he would hear her regardless. "That's right, thermal can't penetrate the station walls," she heard him call back, sure enough.

The marines around her were thrown together from all kinds of units in the 128th Infantry Regiment. Her entire platoon had been reduced to three individuals; her platoon sergeant, Sergeant First Class Joe Machado, Corporal Henry Williams, and herself. They had been thrown

in with members from some completely different battalion, soldiers she had never met before.

She felt strange.

Strange because she was among soldiers whom she had never been with. She couldn't trust anyone since she had never fought back to back with them. War brings out the strangest sides of people, and those calm enough to make intelligent observations can easily see this. Despite what some may say, there are several distinct "types" of personalities.

It's not as simple as just saying someone has a "competitive personality" or an "outgoing personality". A person can be perceptive enough to be able to predict every aspect of a person's character simply by watching them perform specific activities such as combat. Reilly had perfected this art about a year ago by her own estimates.

She had yet to observe the soldiers around her in a fight, but was looking forward to it. The observing, not the fight.

The wing of pelicans steadily approached the _Moscow. _The pelican Reilly happened to be riding on was to infiltrate the stations Northern airlock. The station itself was comprised of two main sections, the MAC cannon and the residential block. The dormant cannon extended high above the residential section and dipped slightly below it as well. In rudimentary terms, Reilly would describe the floating structure to look like a metal tomahawk.

When they were about ten kilometers from the station, the group of pelicans suddenly broke away from each other, each ship heading for its assigned airlock. Reilly's pelican was the first in a group of three to enter the Northern airlock. Flying in a straight line, the airships decreased speed.

"Equipment prep, five minutes till drop," Machado called out.

Reilly raised her weapon up in front of her and looked it over. She was her squad's marksmen, well in her old squad anyway. Therefore she preferred long range combat. The standard S2 AM snipers rifle was wholly unsuitable for the close quarters that the orbital defense platform was comprised of. Instead, the sniper had opted for her customized battle rifle for this particular mission. She had upped the cartridge to a more powerful, 9.6mm round. Using extended magazines she was able to fit twenty five round clips. She had also switched out the rifles standard two times scope for a four times model. To complete her alterations, the marine had replaced the weapons barrel with a heavier, more durable titanium piece, so that the recoil from the heavier cartridge would be more controllable.

The BR55 wasn't meant to be a modular system like the S2 but the marine had learned to adapt it to her needs anyway.

Off in the distance, a pair of blue lights was barely noticeable among the darkness of space between the pelicans and the outer airlock. Upon closer inspection the motes of brilliance seemed to sprout limbs and began pulsating. The lights were that of the exhaust on a covenant thruster pack. The two elites, clad in their airtight

spacesuits, and facemasks, sped toward the pelicans.

It would be considered suicidal by rational thinkers, but rational thinking was the last way these particular elites would think. They knew that they had been left to die. The Armada had left them among billions of these filthy humans. It would be impossible to escape this system and attempt to return home. The dishonor of running from the humans was so great that the pair knew that should they even make it back, they would be killed on sight. That left them one last choice: To suicide and take as many humans with them as possible.

The pelican had just picked up the two small contacts on radar. The elites charged, headlong at the bulky, grey craft. The alien warriors had a gleam in their eyes so sinister, one would never imagine their true intentions. The left elite clutched a small, fist sized, sphere. The explosive charge was already primed and ready to detonate should the activation stud be pressed.

To the pilots of the lead pelican, the elites were simply blue specks in the distance. A camera mounted on top of the cockpit windshield picked up the contacts and zoomed in, transmitting the image to a small screen on the cockpits dashboard. In an instant, the co-pilots hands danced across his keyboard, activating the pelican's weapon systems.

Three feet below the man, the pelicans chin mounted, 20mm, computer automated, rotary cannon sprung to life. The large, four-barreled weapon was capable of firing at a rate of nearly 1200 rounds a minute. The computer FCS automatically locked onto the lead target. In a mechanical whirr of gears and metal, the oblong weapon crisply tilted up and an inch to the left; the fast, precise movements, capable only by computer.

A split second later, the cannons electric motor buzzed loudly, rapidly rotating the cluster of barrels and spitting out rounds. Strobes of light zipped down range and the elites boosted in opposite directions, determined to take down the ship.

The trail of orange slashes arced toward the bomb carrying elite. Pushing his thruster to the limit, he executed a wide curve to the left, the rounds hot on his heels. As the stream closed in, the elite randomly boosted in the opposite direction, the guns computer making a split second adjustment for the new trajectory. While the computer translated the firing solution, the elite took advantage of the slight lapse in gunfire to boost, full speed, toward the ship.

The weapon corrected however, and the warrior was forced to make another hairpin turn to the right. The razor lines of light flashed into the emptiness of the black abyss as they missed their target. Still, there was plenty of ammunition to fire, and the elites were still four hundred meters from the ship.

The second elite, on which the rotary cannon was not firing, boosted by the incoming gunfire, in an attempt to draw some of the heat off the bomber. To no avail however as once the automated system had engaged a target; it was designed not to switch to another until the current threat was neutralized, unless manually told to do so.

The pilots did not have to budge a muscle in fact, as the system did

its work. Strobes of bright yellow flashed from beneath the men and at the targets as the men focused on flying the craft; even if they were only two elites, any threat worried the two pilots. Their weapons weren't perfect, and there was always the chance that an attack, no matter how small or weak, could succeed.

Two hundred and fifty meters from the ship now, the elites appeared to be winning their battle against the human's computer controlled weaponry. However, the closer they got to their target, the more difficult it was to avoid the rapidly moving projectiles.

Inevitably as the bomber elite attempted yet, another, sweeping dodge, his movements were simply too slow. The computers split second corrections finally became faster than the elite's movements, and as the suicidal elite threw forth his soul, his leg exploded as he caught a spattering of the vicious, metallic knives. Howling in pain within his facemask, the elite's momentum slowed. Pieces of metal and flesh trailed from the shattered limb.

Purple blood and flesh died and froze instantly in the vacuum of space, as the warrior tumbled head over heels, helpless to the physics of space. Unable to control his spinning motion, the pelican's cannon closed in. A burning, tingling sensation bit at the elite, creeping its way up his leg and to the rest of his body. His breached suit vented atmosphere and decompression began instantly sucking the life from the doomed warrior. The elite was only half conscious when the rotary cannon struck the rest of his body with full force.

The rounds slammed into the mass of metal and flesh, causing the elite to vibrate sporadically. The 20mm bullets punched into the elites center mass, ripping off pieces of matter and shooting them in every which direction. A bullet slammed into the creatures head, shattering the face plate in a glittering shower of glass and metal, and imbedding itself firmly in the elite's brain. Though the creature was already dead, bullets continued to riddle the corpse for a few seconds until the cannons computer registered that the target had been "neutralized".

The dead elite floated lifeless in space, shreds of broken armor and flesh radiating from the corpse. Thousands of globules of blood floated, flash frozen, in a large purple haze; among the carnage, drifted the, still armed, bomb.

The brief moment of respite was shattered however as the remaining elite boosted toward his dead comrade, eye on the explosive device. Acquiring the new target, the relentless rotary weapon opened fire once more.

Aware of the projectiles stalking him, the elite extended his arm, feet from the bomb. The machine gun reverberated, keeping a steady pace. The elite snatched the bomb in his hand, as he dashed past the dead alien warrior. Tracers blew past him and slammed into the corpse, sending it thrusting backwards toward the station.

The elite shifted the nozzles of his thruster pack upward, propelling him in a steep back flip. Bullets flashed past his head as he completed the maneuver, jetting straight for the pelican, a mere one hundred meters now. He rolled to the left, and then to the right as he got closer and closer to the flashing origin of the

projectiles.

Gouts of light raced past him, from the left, right, top and bottom, inches from his face as the warrior struggled to keep pace. Up, left, down, and back up, no wait to the right, no left; there were too many, they just kept coming until finallyâ€¦ The elite exhaled rapidly as one of the searing projectiles sliced through his shoulder, quickly followed by a second to his arm.

Losing focus, just for an instant, three more rounds slammed into his abdomen then a fourth and fifth, thenâ€¦ There were too many to count; bullets filled his body. The elite extended his arm with the bomb, his thumb pressing on the activation button. A round ricocheted against his thruster pack and the elite gasped. He shoved the bomb off at his target with the last bit of strength he could muster. The image of the rapidly approaching pelican filled the elites view, and his slowly blurring vision was suddenly cut off entirely as his thruster pack erupted, engulfing the dying alien in a brilliant vice of crushing blue flames.

The pelican's pilot jerked his joystick hard to the left to avoid the sudden explosion of fire, pieces of debris already pinging against the windshield.

The bomb, fuse rapidly decreasing, was suddenly propelled forward by the wave of pressure that the explosion had released. The device rocketed forward in a spinning, weightless environment. The fuse hit its termination and the bomb, a mere fifteen meters from the Pelican's starboard side, exploded.

The blue sphere expanded rapidly and slammed into the drop ships side.

Reilly sat a bit nervously in the ship, curious at why they had opened fire. She had felt the heavy vibration of the ships nose cannon, and then an explosion. The ship had listed to the side and nowâ€¦

The marine gasped as she was suddenly pinned against her seat by an incredible force that she could not fight. The pelican shuddered as the marine simply closed her eyes and let her mind race.

She felt that she could die at any moment, that she was about to be sucked into the vacuum of space, or be pierced by something. Closing her eyes and not knowing what was coming would ease the anxiety as she would have no idea what was coming. In space there was no up and down, or left and right because there was no reference points. Any way could be "up". Because of this, the woman had no idea what the ship was going through or how bad the damage was.

She heard a few voices yelling, and the creaking of stressed metal. Here fears returned about being sucked into space. She had never liked flying, ever since she was a child. The constant thought of falling from an incredible height was definitely her greatest fear.

The pressure against her seat began to quickly relax, until finally, she felt herself cushioned once more by the gentle sensation of zero-G, her body held in place only by her seat straps. Reilly realized just how hard she had been squeezing her battle rifles grips

and quickly eased her fingers open. The marine took a deep breath and exhaled.

The very last thing she did was open her eyes. She proceeded to do it slowly, as voices began filling the cabin. As she cracked her eyelids open, an unexpected sight caught her attention, a sight of red. Feeling bold, the woman forced her eyes all the way open, the sight becoming apparent.

A single, small globe of red drifted a few inches from Reilly's nose. She followed the sphere with her eyes, unable to think. A second globe appeared, floating near the first, the surface of both phenomenon gently dipping in and out. A third appeared, then a fourth, then a dozen andâ€¦ Reilly gasped and threw her head back as she realized what was drifting in front of her.

She cocked her head to the right and took in the sight. The blood streamed from the dead marines face; globules floating in the weightless environment within the drop ship. Another second went by before a pair soldiers pulled the corpse from the air and quickly wrapped a cloth around its face, stopping the blood. Reilly looked around at the marines nearby, many of them spattered with blood. There was a particularly dark spot on the side of the Pelicans cabin wall where the soldier had slammed his face against.

No one spoke a sound as the voice of the pilots came over the intercom. "Is everyone ok?" The voice asked. "We lost one," Sergeant Machado chimed back.

Reilly laid her head back against her padded seat and just closed her eyes again.

6. Impact

Sorry about the wait. I've realized that I cannot specify a single day of the week as to when new chapters will be added so just check back every so often.

* * *

>"Hourglass 505 here, I've lost my starboard cam and am going in hard!" The pilot shouted into his mic.<p><p>

The pelican was too close to turn back now. Pelican drop ships had a total of four thrusters mounted on pivoting cams, two main ones on the tip of each wing and two secondary cams on the tip of each tail fin. Its main starboard side thruster had been melted off in the explosion and the pilots were struggling for control.

The pelican, codenamed, hourglass 505, and its cargo of twenty five marines and gear, roared toward the fast approaching station. It was going to have to be a horizontal landing, as landing vertically was impossible without a perfectly even distribution of force from the thrusters.

Reilly held on to the handhold above her, battle rifle strapped around her chest. She gripped the weapon tightly with her other hand as the drop ship shuddered. There were no portholes in the ship, no way of knowing what was racing past her outside. She was in someone

else's hands now and there was nothing that she could do about.

So why whine?

"Hourglass 505, we are proceeding at stand off distance, your on your own until we can land," the pilot of a second pelican replied over the frequency.

The other two pelicans in the boarding party followed about a half kilometer behind Hourglass 505, standard procedure as a damaged ship could lose it at any moment, taking out anything around it. The outer airlock doors were open and waiting, all the pilots had to do was bring this ships velocity gauge to zero within that airlock.

The airlock gate was nearly three stories high and five wide, a pretty large target at first glance. But when your piloting a badly damaged, fifteen ton ship, at two hundred-fifty miles per hour, with nothing to cushion you but a meter thick wall of titanium should you miss, you wish that opening was ten times bigger. The pilot threw all three of the drop ships remaining thrusters into reverse.

The ship slowly decelerated to 200 as the airlock raced into view. The ships metal frame let out a low, stressed groan as the loss of speed acted on its inertia. Both pilot and co-pilot had their hands on a single control stick, their combined strength struggling against the forces pushing on their ship. The ship continued to slow but with only one primary thruster, the process simply could not be completed in time.

The airlock was upon them, the climax soon approached. Physical contact with an object, no matter how small or brief was a pilot's worst fear. A skilled aviator new just how much damage could be caused if even a small part of the ship made contact with another solid force. At the speeds air born flight traveled the power of an impact was incredible.

Alas, as the smallest of twitches in the pilots trembling arms nudged the control stick back, just slightly, the roof of the pelican edged up against the ceiling of the airlock. The dreaded force of friction made itself known in a brilliant display of sparks and the unbearable shrieking of scraping metal.

Attempting to correct, the pilot pushed his arm forward, once again, with the incorrect amount of force due to the sheer vibration of the ship. The drop ship lurched off the metal surface and angled hard for the floor.

Reilly braced herself as she was tugged helplessly against her harness once again. The G-forces generated by the station were beginning to take affect, making the radical motions all the more powerful. The pressure suddenly eased for a split second, before the ship came crashing hard to the floor, still moving.

In the chaos of controlling the damaged ship, the pilot had not taken the time to fasten his own safety harness and as a result was sent hurling downwards, head first, into the cockpit dashboard. Sparks erupted and steam clouded the visor as the man's head collided with the dash. Electricity crackled as the man slumped to the left, blood dripping from his destroyed face. The co-pilot didn't even look.

The only thing that was on his mind was landing this ship. Through the steam and blood spattering on the windshield the pilot kept his hold on the stick as the ship rattled across the vacant airlock bay, slowly losing momentum. The inner door was coming closer and closer. Shifting to the side by the unbalanced propulsion of a single main thruster, the ship struck the right wall, the damaged wing slicing through power conduits and circuitry until it finally snapped off completely.

The pelican spun on its axis, to the right, so that the port side was going to strike the inner blast door upon impact. Thoughts raced through the pilots head amidst the sparks and smoke, a small fire now starting on the dashboard. _The marines need to live, they need to fight,_ the pilot screamed to himself. He couldn't let the passenger section of the pelican strike the gate. In a desperate attempt to right the ship so that the cockpit was facing forward once more, the pilot shifted the remaining starboard thruster, the one on the tail, to face backwards.

Routing power from the port tail thruster to the starboard tail thruster, the pelican began to turn once again, not as chaotic this time however. Though his mind was still on fire, the pilot knew in his heart that he had done what needed to be done. As soon as the ship finished turning back forward, the inner airlock gate filled the pilots view. The nose of the pelican made contact with the blast door and the cockpit crumpled under the weight of the drop ship.

The anonymous pilot closed his eyes; the last glimpse he caught was of the windshield coming towards him. Then he was crushed, his ribs snapped down the middle simultaneously as his chest cavity exploded, all breath gone, his face met the sheet of glass and his skull cracked down the middle. Finally, his bone structure destroyed, his brain began to be pressed within his head, his skin beginning to split as if they had seams. A split second later, the small antennae on top of the cockpit snapped off and pinged to the floor of the airlock bay.

He was actually conscious until that antenna hit the floor.

"Hourglass 505 respond. I repeat, Hourglass 505 respond," the co-pilot of the second pelican said into his mic. The frequency was all quiet. In fact it seemed everything was quiet, no one making a sound. The downed pelican lay lifelessly against the inner airlock door, a small trail of debris strewn out behind it.

The pilots of the second and third pelicans as well as their co-pilots said nothing. There was nothing to say, they could only wait. The two remaining ships began their descent toward the airlock gate when suddenly, the doors began to close.

In a screech of metal, the outer blast doors inched their way toward each other, aiming to seal the airlock. The pilots were crestfallen. Their comrades were trapped now, inside that airlock, and they had no idea what their status was. The ships were still some ways off from the station and as the doors completed the last few feet of their guide railings, the pilots caught one last glimpse of the wrecked pelican within.

Then the doors slammed shut, locking, airtight, and bringing an end

to the frantic boarding.

Within the airlock, the inner doors were beginning to part, as soon as the outer doors were closed. Beyond these parting inner doors lay the launch bay and access to the rest of the station. The pelican shifted clumsily as the doors retracted, its crushed cockpit scraping against the moving metal. Then, with a metallic lock, the inner doors completed their opening and all was quiet once again.

* * *

>She felt something; she couldn't place where it was though. What part of her was feeling this touch? It was to the right slightly, just below herâ€|<p><p>

Reilly's eyes suddenly shot open and she was staring at a pair of green and grey battle fatigue pants. She lifted her head up to look at who the pants were connected to. She didn't recognize the marine standing in front of her. She then looked to her right, her shoulder still being shaken. She brushed the annoying hand away and came eye to eye with Henry Williams.

"Are you okay," he said, amongst the bustle of activity within the drop ship. His face was obscured for a moment as a gentle wisp of smoke passed by him. "Yeahâ€| Yeah I'm fine," she said, her voice a bit shaky. It all was coming back now as she gripped her battle rifle once more. She slowly lifted her head back and sighed. She was alive, for the time being at least.

Sergeant Machado stood up and took charge of the rambling marines. "Marines, maintain discipline, secure your equipment and prepare to move. We still have a mission to complete. This little mishap changes nothing, our pilots did their jobs and now we have to do ours."

_Pilots, were they dead? _Reilly thought to herself. She peered up at the bio monitors over head and searched the chart for the two men. The red caught her eye immediately; both pilots were indeed, gone. _I'm alive; we all are because of them,_ Reilly exhaled.

The fazed marine grasped at her harness clasp and released it. She stood up and stretched her muscles. She had been sitting for way to long. As sergeant Machado had instructed, the young woman quickly did a once over of her gear. All pieces intact, she didn't have a scratch on her. Her thoughts returned to the dead pilots. _I wonder if it was painfulâ€|_

Her thoughts were interrupted however, as a distinct noise suddenly caught her ear. It was brief, lasting just a moment and was incredibly faint, but Reilly's keen hearing served her well. The sound was some sort of buzzing, like when a mosquito flies by your ear for just a moment. Trying to listen for the sound again, Reilly closed her eyes. Then, much more loudly, the buzzing filled her head once more. She shuddered involuntarily, as the sound seemed to have come from just above.

She saw that more soldiers around her had noticed the sound, and many were now staring at the ceiling of the drop ship, trying to locate its source. It came again, from a different direction, and then another. Every soul aboard the ship was curious now, and every ear

was turned. No one made a sound. In a loud crescendo, the buzzing started softly and increased in volume. It was all around now. Reilly backed away from the wall of the ship and came into contact with the back of another marine. She didn't know who he was nor did she care, but it gave her a warm reassurance to have another gun watching her back.

Then as quickly as the noise had come, it ceased. Reilly knew now, she knew exactly what it was. The words still in her throat, a loud bang sounded on the roof of the drop ship. Many marines instinctively ducked, raising their weapons up at the source of motion.

"B-buggers on the roof!" A marine shouted. Reilly promptly closed her mouth as another marine beat her to the chase.

A loud high pitched screech permeated the sporadic buzzing. The loud clanking on the roof traveled in a line, as if the creature overhead was moving. A second loud bang struck some distance from the first, and then a third came at the pelican's side. A low buzzing sounded and rapidly increased in pitch as another, loud impact was felt on the port side of the ship, followed by a loud shriek. They were ramming the ship.

"Hold your fire, nobody do anything rash," Sergeant Machado said in a low voice. This was bad, Reilly thought. They were in a desperate position. The drones circling outside were like vultures awaiting the death of a wounded animal. They were trapped inside this tin can and the only way out was through the rear hatch. If they attempted to exit however, they would be sitting ducks on the flat, objectless space of the airlock floor. The drones would be able to pick them off like ants.

Though Reilly doubted that the drones could penetrate the armor plating of the pelican drop ship, they still had the advantage.

Sergeant Machado barely flinched as the next, loud impact sounded inches from him. His options were limited. The floor of the hangar was as barren as a desert, no cover for a hundred and fifty feet in every direction. There was always the possibility that the buggers would lose interest. If they were quiet enough, perhaps they would think that nobody was still alive. Another loud shriek sounded outside and a second, wet impact slammed the pelican, the heavy ship not moving an inch.

Joe Machado had fought buggers before but never did they act so crazed. They were gonna beat themselves to a pulp if they kept hurling themselves at the ship like this. Why were they so determined to get inside and kill them? Joe knew that drones weren't exactly intelligent but they also weren't stupid enough to kill themselves by ramming into a hard surface. So then why were they doing it? Why did they need to kill so badly?

No. That wasn't it. The alien's main goal wasn't to simply kill the humans. The thought was almost spine tingling to the hardened marine.

They were hungry. They wanted to eat. That had to be it; he couldn't think of another explanation for the drone's behavior. The aliens outside knew that there was food aboard this ship, whether they would

have to kill it or not. _So there hunger crazed eh? _The sergeant thought. Hunger was a driving force of insanity, Joe knew that. He didn't like what he knew.

"What are we gonna do sir?" A marine blurted out. Sergeant Machado hesitated. "We wait soldier, if we go out there, were gonna get ripped apart." The marine looked downcast. It was already getting to him; the claustrophobia.

Reilly slumped back down into her seat. A single drop of sweat rolled down the bridge of her nose. With twenty five marines and no form of air circulation what so ever, this dead ship was going to heat up fast. She was in for a difficult time, but she was prepared. Hopefully the men around her had not forgotten their training.

* * *

>Michael lurched up and squeezed the trigger of his carbine. A line of green energy sliced through the air and struck a grunt square in the fore-head, mid-stride. As the alien fell forward, more covenant scrambled for cover, as additional plasma flashed down the hall.<p><p>

Hitting the release stud, the mushroom shaped container on the top of the gun was ejected outward, steaming. Michael shoved a second container into the top of the rifle, locking the clasp and retracting the bolt.

The covenant seemed to have heard his fear. Down the hall, figures ran back and forth, one or two shots being squeezed off every so often. Michael lay behind the collapsible blast shield. The barrier had been erected in the hallway leading to the western bridge platform. Michael glanced at the open doorway behind him, the edges blackened and charred from the earlier assault.

Private Brown lay next to Michael, a plasma rifle in his hands. "S-sir, what are we going to do?" He questioned in a wavering voice. The corporal looked to the young man next to him, taking in his status. Oh he was scared alright, but not to the point of irrational thinking, Michael thought. _Well what can I say? _

"We hold our ground marine, unless you want to charge down the hall of course," Michael said solemnly. "Everyone else is holding their positions, if you would feel safer with one of them, then you are free to join them if you can find a replacement for yourself," Michael added. Private Brown looked downcast. He winced as a green bolt of plasma sizzled over the top of the barrier and struck the far wall.

"I'm, uh, fine here, I don't need to run," he said. He could at least try to sound brave. "Your choice," Michael said as he got up on his knees and peered over top of the shield.

A single orange clad grunt trotted down the stretch of hall. The corpses of grunts lay strewn against the sides of the hall, pools of blue streaking the metal around them. The single covenant soldier continued his advance, his eye on the blast shield. Suddenly a figure appeared from below the barrier. The determined grunt warrior raised his plasma pistol. Before he could even attempt to aim however, a green strobe ensconced the figure.

The grunt immediately felt his arm go limp as the radioactive projectile pierced its length. The plasma pistol clattered to the floor along with a spurt of blue phosphorous. The diminutive alien dropped to his stubby knees and exhaled rapidly into his face mask, pain surging through his mind. A second round lanced out and stabbed him in the chest, punching clean through his armor and flesh. He feels backwards, as a high pitched hissing noise filled his ears. Losing the feeling in his lower body, the wounded warrior peered down at his methane gauge.

He felt a soft breeze on his open, flowing wound, proof that he was venting atmosphere. The gauge mounted on the creature's chest was slowly decreasing with every passing second. The grunt struggled to move but he couldn't feel his legs. The grunt cocked his head back as a new wave of pain shot through his side.

Michael lay back down on the metal floor once again. He knew that the grunt was not dead, but he didn't want to waste another shot. The alien was crippled and of no threat; besides the grunt would probably die very soon.

"How many shots do you have left, sir?" David asked. "Thirty-four, marine," he replied.

"Well what happens when we run out?" David asked. Michael felt a slight pang of annoyance at the young marine's nervous questions. "If we run out private, then we use something else besides the gun. There are plenty of other things that you can use as weapons. You still have your knife don't you?" "Yeah I've got it," David responded patting the sheath strapped to his leg.

"Well that knife will never run out of ammo, so you won't have to worry about that when you do use it as a weapon."

The problem was he didn't want to use it. David was scared enough when the plasma was shooting at him from a distance, but to face the covenant at close range was a truly horrifying thought. _It would be so easy to get killed at that range; I mean I'd be a sitting duck. I could get shot in the back, _he thought to himself, nausea stirring in his stomach. Michael quickly saw the predictable affects that his words had had on the soldier's mind.

"Just conserve your ammo and we may make it through this," Michael reassured the marine. He had to include the 'might' in his statement because he couldn't promise anything. He could never promise anything after all. Not in a war zone.

The hollow clanking of footsteps on the metal floor filled Michael's ears. He looked up at the doorway leading back to the bridge just in time to see Kiesha's small figure pop into view.

"He are you guys-," she managed to get out before Michael sprung from the floor snatched her wrists and yanked her towards him. She stumbled forward and her feet connected with the side of David's legs, sending her sprawling down. The three marines landed in a heap behind the blast shield as a wave of plasma washed around them. Heat washed over Michaels exposed face as the sizzling bolts flashed past them. Green and blue crackled against the shield and wall, droplets melting like butter on a hot skillet as they made contact with the

metal surfaces.

"Idiot, you almost got yourself killed!" Michael yelled angrily at the woman next to him as the barrage slowed. Kiesha didn't wince as a bolt whizzed past her head. She didn't even try to retaliate at Michael's comment. She had been a pinch from getting fried. But she was still alive somehow; through all of this she was still alive. It had taken her recent brush with death to realize just how lucky she had been up to this point.

"Are you ok," Michael said, in a calmer voice as the plasma died down. Kiesha looked up at him, a dazed look still on her face. Her emerald eyes reflected something that Michael simply could not place. They were emotionless, staring off at something that he could not see. It was the same look that he had seen in sergeant Ramos eyes the moment before he died. He took in the rest of her face. Her face angled in gentle curves, small droplets of perspiration were formed along the edge of her bandanna. Her lips were parted just slightly and her breathing was low and shallow.

"Barkerâ€|" Michael said softly. She blinked once and her eyes connected with Michaels. "I-I'm fine, she uttered finally. The two didn't break their gaze.

David peeked over Kiesha's shoulder: "Yeah I'm okay too sir," he said.

Michael slumped back to the metal floor and heaved a sigh. _Where are those reinforcements?_

End
file.